

still waters

home church studies

Psalm 40.1-11

[Worship]

1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. 4 Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. 5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. 6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. 7 Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." 9 I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. 10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. 11 Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

Consider:

[Think & Pray...]

By the time the gospel of John was written, Peter - the rock upon whom the church is built, as Matthew's gospel puts it - had become a symbol within the church of apostolic, hierarchical authority. This creeping authoritarianism threatened to betray the vision of Spirit-based, egalitarian community.

The experience is a familiar one. A small, struggling community of believers searching for truth and justice finds the Spirit present in its

midst. They are set aflame with the joy and peace of deep insight into God's call for them and for the church as a whole. They rush to their sisters and brothers in the larger church, offering the gift of their new revelation. But instead of open acceptance, they hit the brick wall of institutional rejection. Rather than being embraced, they are ignored.

If they insist on their version of truth, the reaction stiffens into anger, hatred, persecution. Eventually, they must decide: Do we in turn reject the institutional church in favor of our own Spirit-filled vision of justice and peace? Or do we continue to witness to the religious powers, no matter what the price?

This scenario, familiar to modern-day Christians who often find the institutional church hard-hearted to Jesus' message of nonviolence and love, describes the situation of that ancient community of Christians who grounded themselves in the story of Jesus known to us as the gospel of John. Frequently, "spiritualized" interpretations of the fourth gospel ignore the social crucible of love and hostility in which the text was formed. A reading of the text sensitive to political and social reality reveals a Johannine community in a life-or-death struggle with "the powers" over a Jesus who loved the world enough to die for it and to send his disciples out on a mission like his own.



[The Scripture]

John 1.31-36

31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." 35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"